

PROSPECTS FOR THE TURKISH NATIONAL ELECTIONS

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On 27 October 1957, elections to the Grand National Assembly are scheduled to be held in Turkey. (State, Weeka No. 37 C-141, 13 Sep 57, Secret.) The date has been advanced from the expected date of sometime in the Spring of 1958 by decision, apparently, of Prime Minister Adnan Menderes, no doubt on the assumption that the time is now more expeditious for his party, the Democratic Party (DP), than next year.

Turkey is suffering from severe inflation, a rising cost of living, and a shortage of consumer goods--especially coffee--which threatens to get worse between now and next May. Therefore, the Prime Minister probably considers that the situation in Syria, particularly since the Syrian viewpoint is supported by the USSR, may result in more support for him now than later.

The Democratic Party overwhelmingly defeated the then incumbent group, the People's Republican Party (PRP), in the elections of 1950, when they won 408 seats out of a total of 487. Next, they increased their majority in the 1954 elections, which are held about every four years, by winning 504 seats out of 541. (News from Turkey, Turkish Information Office, New York, 2 Oct 57, Unclassified.) Since that time, they have lost a measure of their support, in particular to the Freedom Party (FP), which consists of dissident elements of the DP who, late in 1955, broke with their former group, as much because of the authoritarian nature of the DP leader, Menderes, as for any other reason.

The financial situation, despite US aid, has been deteriorating, largely perhaps because of Menderes' determination to follow through on many more projects and developmental schemes than Turkey has the ability to pay for, at least in their inception. These factors are among those responsible for the apparently decreased popularity of Menderes and his group. This deterioration may have already progressed so far as to result in his overthrow. There are three principal parties opposing him: the PRP, the FP, and a rightist group, known as the Republican National Party (RNP), which has certain religious, extremist aspects in its platform, not likely to appeal to the Turkish electorate. It has only four members in the present Assembly and its leader, Bolukbasi, is in prison. The PRP, oldest established and strongest among the

opposition groups, is led by former President Ismet Inonu, who is running despite his age (75). Although the PRP is making a determined effort, the average Turkish voter has, perhaps, sharp memories of absolutist PRP rule from the foundation of the Turkish Republic in 1923 until its overthrow by the DP in 1950, to give the PRP the votes it needs to reverse the tables on the DP. The average Turkish elector, if he has a fairly long memory, is liable to view with scepticism PRP charges that the DP has unduly curbed such matters as certain civil liberties and the freedom of the press. (State, OIR Intelligence Brief No. 2192, 9 Oct 57.) The FP has never been tested by the Turkish electorate and constitutes the chief unknown quantity in the forthcoming elections. It is led by Karacemanoğlu, formerly a DP deputy, who led the present small group (34) out of the DP in 1955. Since its strength in the country cannot yet be gauged, statements that it is increasing cannot be adequately estimated.

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There are no other parties of any consequence disputing the elections. The Communist Party is banned and a small front organization, the Fatherland Party, has no following of any size and may even soon be banned itself.

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Menderes, who is generally credited with being a shrewd politician, took several steps, besides advancing the date of the national elections, with the object of adding to the chances of the DP. He forestalled any likelihood of a coalition of the parties opposing him by having the Assembly pass an amendment to the electoral law on 11 September 1957, just before its dissolution which in effect frustrates any attempt at anti-government coalition. He also has had nominated as DP candidates the top figures of the three military services (Army, Navy, Air). His objective in doing this, in a country where military figures are notoriously highly esteemed, is presumably to add to the DP's prestige. Similarly, while there is considerable grumbling about economic conditions, there is not only the Syrian situation which may prove helpful, but also virtual unanimity (except for the relatively small Greek-speaking minority) about the attitude of the present Turkish Government toward Cyprus.

The peasant population (about 70 per cent of the electorate) is usually considered as in support of the DP and on this, certainly, by tax concessions and crop facilities, the

DP is counting. Minor gestures of a religious nature toward this segment of the population have been made in recent years by the DP, which is well aware that the reformist zeal of the late, revered Ataturk has not yet affected the rural population as much as the urban.

Whichever way the election goes (the DP is generally conceded the victory, albeit with a much reduced majority), no major change in the present Turkish foreign policy need be expected. Of the possible winners--DP, PRP or FP--there will undoubtedly be no change in Turkey's policies, which anchor it firmly to the West.